

# Microaggression Overview

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Here's a list of common microaggressions towards Black people, why they're offensive, and what to say/do instead. Keep in mind microaggressions happen not only towards Black people, but any marginalized group: women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people too.

**"I'm not racist - I have Black friends."**

This implies that racism is simply a lack of relationships with Black people, ignoring systemic and institutional racism. It's offensive because it minimizes racism and what it means to be "not racist," and it's also an example of white centering (see your [anti-racist dictionary](#)). If you live the values of anti-racism, there's no need to make this statement at all.

**"I don't see color."**

This implies that the identity and experiences associated with the color of Black peoples' skin don't matter. It's similar to saying "All Lives Matter," a statement that implicitly silences Black voices, lived experiences, historical context, racism, and oppression.

"I don't see color" is a way of thinking that was perpetuated for many in childhood, with the result of ignoring our differences (rather than appreciating them) and avoiding important discussions about racism among family and friends.

**"You're so articulate / well-spoken / eloquent."**

This implies that Black people are assumed to not be articulate, and that white people are assumed to be well-spoken. Making this comment is a reflection of one's unconscious bias - they are literally surprised by a Black person's eloquence. It's great to compliment Black people, but be careful if that compliment might overlap with an existing stereotype, such as "articulate" or "well-spoken." Say "you're such a powerful speaker" or "you really captivated the room today."



“Can I touch your hair? / How long did it take to do your hair? / How do you get your hair to do that?”

Beyond crossing personal boundaries, this implies that the recipient is a rare object that's on display for others to interact with or question. This is also an example of privilege - the speaker thinks they have the right to touch or ask about Black person's hair.

“Where are you from?”

This implies that the person is a foreigner because of the color of their skin. Furthermore, it implies that knowing their race is a starting point for understanding them, introducing bias and stereotypes. When you just meet someone for the first time, the vast majority of what you know about them is their appearance. So try to avoid questions with strangers that are based on someone's looks, and - you know - just get to know them first. Have normal convo. If you're getting to know someone organically and this comes up, that's fine. For example, if you say “I'm from Oakland” and they say “I'm from New York,” that's totally natural.

“[Black person] is pretty white / acts white / sounds like a white person”

This implies that Black people are expected to act in a certain way because of their race, rather than as a result of their personal experiences and choices. “Acts white” or “sounds like a white person” reinforces biases about what white people are comfortable with when it comes to dating, working with and having relationships with Black people. It's generally ok to describe a person's personality, but correlating race with personality traits is always going to be offensive. Instead, just describe someone's personality with terms that aren't associated with their race.

“How do Black people feel about [something]?”

This implies that Black people all feel the same way about things, and minimizes their personal experiences and opinions. Instead, ask the person how they as an individual feel about that thing.

\*Sees a Black man, crosses the street.\*

This reinforces a stereotype that Black men are a threat. Next time, recognize your bias and treat him like a human being by not crossing the street.

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